United Nations E/AC.51/2000/L.8/Add.1

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
25 August 2000

Original: English

Committee for Programme and Coordination
Fortieth session (Part II)
21-29 August 2000

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Amjad Hussain B. **Sial** (Pakistan)

Programme questions: programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1998-1999 (item 3 (a))

1. At its 25th and 26th meetings, on 26 June 2000, the Committee considered the report of the Secretary-General on the programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1998-1999 (A/55/73).

2. The Under-Secretary-General for the Office of Internal Oversight Services introduced the report and responded to questions raised during the Committee's consideration of the report.

Discussion

3. Concerns were voiced over the late submission of the report because it reduced the ability of delegations to analyse and present views on the report in a comprehensive manner.

4. Appreciation was expressed regarding the improved quality of the report, which provided a better basis from which to assess the results achieved from the implementation of mandated activities and helped programme managers and Member States to apply the lessons learned to the following biennium and to improve programme performance. Appreciation was also expressed for the inclusion of qualitative assessments, as mandated by General Assembly resolution 53/207, as well as the analytical approach applied to the evaluation of the significant volume of data collected. In that regard, it was noted that the report contained some useful qualitative evidence of programme performance and impact, especially from the use of modern technologies, the specific and quantified evidence of the number of requests for assistance and their impact, and achievements backed by concrete indicators. Future programme performance reports should accentuate both the

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positive and the negative aspects of the impact of implemented outputs, and indicate areas for improvement as well as successes, with clear evidence of achievements.

5. The Committee considered that the overall rate of implementation of 88 per cent, the highest level in a decade, was a clear indication that the Secretary-General's reform initiatives had benefited the Organization and noted that, where implementation rates were relatively low, it was explained as being the result of either legislative decisions or programmatic changes. In that regard, the view was expressed that it was the responsibility of programme managers to use resources provided to them by Member States in the programme budget to achieve full implementation of mandates. It was stressed that, in agreeing to the budget, Member States provided what they considered to be adequate resources to implement mandated activities fully and, therefore, programme managers had to use those resources optimally to achieve the objectives set by Member States. In that regard, programme managers could only achieve full implementation of mandated activities if they clearly knew what Member States wanted them to do. The clarity and transparency on the part of programme managers would allow Member States to assess whether there had been full implementation or not, whether resources were provided at the right level and to the right areas and whether the orientation of programmes should be redirected. It was noted that some departments had achieved rates of implementation beyond the 100 per cent mark while others did not fully implement their programme of work. It was also observed that the report did not contain adequate information on mandates that were not implemented for lack of resources. The view was expressed that more information on the impact of limited resources on programme implementation, as well as emphasis on what affected programme implementation, with suggestions for remedial measures to be taken, would have been useful.

6. Concerns were expressed regarding whether the terminations, especially those decided by programme managers, were carried out in accordance with the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation. Concern was also expressed that a total of 1,732 outputs were added at the initiative of the Secretariat, when the implementation of mandated outputs by Member States should have been given priority. With regard to the further postponement of carried-over outputs and their continuing relevance, it was stated that that consideration should be taken into account in the preparation of future budgets and medium-term plans. Concern was also expressed about the level of dependency on extrabudgetary resources to implement the regular programme of work. In that regard, it was suggested that the use of such resources and their availability should be further addressed to ensure predictable sources of financing so that future mandated activities would not be affected, given that 14 per cent of the terminated outputs were attributed to vacancies and a shortage of extrabudgetary resources.

7. It was observed that consideration should be given to altering the timing of the programme performance report so that it more closely matched the budgeting cycle, and to including indicators of achievement in budgets which would further improve the basis of programme planning and monitoring. The provision of clearer expected accomplishments and benchmarks by which performance would be measured would help provide a basis for judging whether mandated activities had been fully implemented and would help guide decisions on resources. It was useful for programme managers and Member States to consider what was achieved in the past

as they considered future programmes and whether the current levels of resources provided were appropriate. In that regard, the provision of a clearer description of what was intended and reporting on what was achieved would help that consideration.

8. The language contained in paragraph 47 of A/55/73 was not as provided in General Assembly resolutions. The inferred linkages between programme planning, budgeting and the allocation of resources or results-based budgeting had not been discussed and agreed upon in the General Assembly. The programme performance report should be considered a tool for accountability on the part of programme managers and, therefore, consideration should be given to the participation of the Office of Human Resources Management, jointly with programme managers in the preparation of the programme performance report.

9. Concern was expressed as to the criteria used in reference to paragraph 29, as well as paragraph 42 of the report. In that regard, the view was expressed that further clarification, refinement and analysis were needed. Concern was also raised regarding the impact of reform and restructuring as reflected in the qualitative assessment sections for the Office of Legal Affairs (annex, sect. 6) and for UNCTAD (annex, sect. 11A).

10. The Committee commended the efforts by United Nations departments and offices aimed at strengthening monitoring modalities and performance evaluation. In recognition of the need to improve programme implementation by the institutionalization of computerized programme performance monitoring and reporting systems, the view was expressed that there should be a harmonized approach within the United Nations to ensure cost-effective strategies for computer-based monitoring systems development and application.

11. It was also suggested that the Office of Internal Oversight Services should carefully examine the inputs from substantive departments before including them in the performance reports so that the reports reflect objectively the actual performance by programme managers.

Conclusions and recommendations

12. The Committee noted with appreciation the overall high implementation rate achieved by the Secretariat. It requested all reporting entities to bear in mind that systematic and consistent programme monitoring were critical components of programme management, and all departments/offices that had not already done so should establish viable and compatible monitoring systems.

13. The Committee noted with appreciation the inclusion of the qualitative assessments, prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 53/207. However, some of the assessments were too general and not very helpful in determining whether activities had resulted in expected outcomes. To that end, the Committee looked forward to further refinement of future programme performance reports in full compliance with the revised Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation.